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Communists And India's Freedom Struggle

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Preface

On the eve of the Golden Jubilee of our Independence an important fact needs to be recorded that the struggle for independence neither started with the establishment of the Congress Party nor the battle was fought exclusively under the Congress's banner and on the Congress platform It will also be wide off the mark if it is claimed that the Indian National Congress absorbed all the rich heritages of the earlier anti colonial struggles

Even after the Indian National Congress came into existence the struggle of national revolutionaries (termed as terrorists in the British parlance) workers peasants armed forces (Peshawar RIN mutiny and INA) people of princely states and post war upsurge provided various streams of a mighty flow which resulted in the collapse of the British rule in the general background of the rout of axis power mainly at the hand of Soviet Red Army

The series of pamphlets being brought out by the Communist Party Publications is an attempt to note the contributions of these other streams of freedom struggle

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Independence Golden Jubilee Series

COMMUNISTS AND INDIA'S FREEDOM STRUGGLE

I

We are celebrating the golden jubilee of our Independence This is an occasion to look back into the long history of our Freedom Struggle to assess the contribution made by various forces that had worked for crowning it with victory It is also an occasion to trace the path traversed through five decades of Freedom and to take stock of our achievements and failures This is necessary to correctly orient our people for the challenges ahead Without an objective understanding of our history our past, we cannot correctly chart our path to the future

To write about our Freedom Struggle is to deal with one of the most outstanding events of the twentieth century an event that initiated and accelerated the collapse of the colonial system

The nineteenth century witnessed the relentless march of the colonial powers who subjugated one country after another by the ruthless use of arms against defenceless or poorly equipped people They used their superior economic might--the might of the capitalist system, to seize the raw material resources and capture the markets of these countries

The twentieth century marked the rise of the national liberation movement in the colonies of imperialism Colonies in Asia and Africa, as also in Latin America won their independence in this century through prolonged and bitter struggles The twentieth century has been marked by great changes for social and cultural progress and economic emancipation Revolutions that heralded a new social system in the history of mankind--the system of socialism took place in this century Mankind

advanced from national suppression to national independence from exploitation and oppression to radical improvement in the peoples' life, from autocracy to democracy and upholding of human rights It has been a century of social change and human emancipation No doubt there have been serious defeats and set backs in the course of the onward march But more profoundly lasting has been the advance towards social progress

More than anything else four events have brought about a fundamental transformation in the world political scenario They are the Great October Socialist Revolution, the victory over fascism in the Second World War in which the USSR played the decisive role the freedom won by India and the victorious Chinese Revolution led by the communists

There are scribes--for to call them historians would be an insult to all historians who try to show that India got its freedom almost as a gift from the British masters' Fantastic nonsense is peddled about the backroom palaverings of individuals which supposedly brought Freedom at Midnight' to the Indian people The role of individuals in shaping our history is certainly great But it would be unpardonable to refuse to see the Indian people, the social forces that heroically fought for freedom through almost two centuries, during which they had to suffer the severest repression and undergo sacrifices such as few people have done

There have also been concerted attempts to claim that the Congress alone fought for freedom, and brought freedom to the country This has been the usual tone of all so-called official history' These were not just attempts at distorting history with a view to claim exclusive credit for a historic event that changed the destiny of our people and contributed in reshaping the world They had the aim to camouflage the interests of the bourgeois ruling class by contending that therefore the Congress alone could take the country forward and has the sole right to govern the country

Even as recently as a week before the golden jubilee of independence at the 84th session of the Congress the ridiculous and boastful claim has been made in its political resolution that, "The 20th century has been the Congress century It is the Indian National Congress which in the first half of the century led the country to freedom It is the Congress which in the second half of the century has led the country in building the modern nationhood of independent India "

It is true that the Indian National Congress played the leading part especially during the last few decades of our freedom struggle It is the Congress which ultimately steered the country to freedom It is to the Congress that the British imperialists finally transferred power' on August 15 1947 even though this was accompanied by the partition of the country and the great human tragedy that followed the partition

But be it remembered that by the thirties of the century the Congress had evolved as a platform for all the forces involved in the liberation struggle whether communists socialists other radicals from the left the centrists or the forces from the right in India s political life All of these functioned within the INC as integral parts of the common and united national movement while maintaining their independent separate identity The path had already been cleared by the political movements preceding these years

The activities of Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bepin Chandra Pal and others had radicalised the Congress From petition making' the Congress had oriented itself towards the masses With the advent of Mahatma Gandhi and under his leadership the Congress began acquiring a mass character However our anti-colonial struggle did not begin with the founding of the Congress nor did it remain confined thereafter to the Congress

The Indian National Congress was founded in 1885 while the struggle against the alien rulers one might say began from the dav the British launched their drive to subjugate the coun

try There were countless streams which flowed into the mighty flood of the freedom struggle Each of them made its contribution to the development of the struggle The later streams made significant contributions in widening and deepening the movement for national liberation They involved the broader sections of our oppressed and toiling masses in the liberation struggle and imparted it a new militancy They gave content and meaning to our people's aspiration for freedom which then went on to victory

II

The British formed their **East India Company** for trade with India in about 1600 The Company got its charter from the British Parliament in 1698--renewed in 1708 This gave the Company the monopoly right of trade with India The minions of the Company found an India where with the death of Aurangzeb (1707) the central Mughal authority had fast begun to crumble and provincial governors had become more or less independent They found a society which was deeply divided, where internecine conflicts had led to ruin and decay of the old irrigation system, where taxes and wars had already exhausted the people It was a situation which the Company could profitably exploit It dealt directly with the local rulers and extracted concessions for its trade Taking advantage of the internecine wars it began to interfere politically also, playing off one against the other, helping one side and then the other with arms and money Better equipped and experienced, the rising British capitalist class confronted the decaying feudal class in India outwitting it both politically and militarily From trade the British went over to the politics of power which became a necessity for protecting and expanding their trading interests and whetting their imperial ambitions

With the victoryover **Nawab Sirajuddoulah** in the **Battle of Plassey** (1757) the British emerged on the Indian political

scene as a force to be reckoned with

The defeat of **Tipu Sultan** and the British triumph over their French, Dutch and Portuguese rivals consolidated their political control over the south of the country Following the defeat of the Marathas (1803), i e by the beginning of the 19th century, they had already attained a position of being the most important and powerful force in our country By this time the rule of Shah Alam, the Mughal emperor was confined to Delhi and its environs Local rulers elsewhere had increasingly come to depend on British arms and money, and on their capacity for political intrigues and manoeuvres As always, disunity and internal treachery provided fertile ground for the successful penetration and spread of foreign aggression

III

Here one should pause and analyse the factors behind the unity of the Indian people and their evolution and integration into a nation Only then one can understand the immensely powerful motive force operating behind the Indian people's struggle for national liberation

Though the British colonialists found a country badly divided into several warring kingdoms and fiefdoms, and cunningly exploited this situation, there had always been an underlying sense of oneness' and togetherness' among the people inhabiting the vast Indian subcontinent This had become a historical legacy It had been so despite diversities of language and culture among people in the different regions of the country They were not alien to each other, with as if nothing in common among them They regarded the entire geographical territory bound by the lofty Himalayan chain in the north and by the three seas in the east, west and south as their common land and shared a common heritage and common destiny Mythological traditions and Itihas' as related in the great epics had reinforced this feeling of oneness' A shared history of common culture enriched by the pluralism that had gone into its making, a shared psychological makeup and outlook laid the

foundation for Indian nationhood At all times when the people rose in revolt or fought against alien invaders they fought for the liberation not of this or that region of the country, but of the whole territory that made up Bharat', or what had come to be known as Hindustan' Through the centuries, the several waves of people or invaders that came from the north actually settled down and got integrated and assimilated into the Indian society This has been beautifully expressed in Rabindranath Tagore's and Iqbal's famous songs or Firaq Gorakhpuri's poetry The only exception have been the British who came as alien aggressors and remained as aliens all through

However, the British in their own interest of exploiting the huge market and resources of this country brought about an economic unity that further strengthened the sense of unity prevailing among the people The country became one economic entity In the course of the common struggle for liberation from British imperialist rule there took place an upsurge of patriotism and an unprecedented growth in national consciousness among all sections of the Indian people This acted as a powerful motive force behind the national liberation struggle which ultimately brought the country to Freedom

IV

In 1765, the East India Company had extracted several concessions from the local rulers The company obtained the dewani of Bengal, Bihar and Orissa, i e the right to collect land revenue Plunder was already going on in the name of trade The dewani right enabled them to intensify the exploitation of the Indian peasant--the main productive force in Indian society at that time Land revenue which was Rs 65 lakhs in 1764-65 was pushed up to the figure of Rs 268 lakhs by 1793 after Lord Cornwallis carried through the permanent settlement of Bengal The constantly increasing burden on the peasantry, accompanied by total neglect of the old irrigation system brought untold misery to the peasants and led to devastating famines

Through the permanent settlement of Bengal, the British imposed an alien feudal system in India, which was something quite different from the prevailing system of the selfsufficient village community A new class of landlords as the social base of the British colonial rulers was thus created This system further ruined the Indian peasantry With the further development of the process, the immiserisation of the peasantry gave birth to landless labourers or the new class of the agricultural proletariat

The other class in the Indian society of the time which was participating in the process of production consisted of the artisans and craftsmen producing cloth metalware and other kinds of goods The East India Company used its political power and as against it the weakness of India s feudal power, to compel this class to sell its manufactured goods at extremely low prices only to be sold at fabulously high prices in the European markets

This was another source of colonial plunder In this process of exploitation the famed artisans and craftsmen were also ruined Many of them, as also many from the peasantry who were ruined and deprived of their own means of production migrated to the urban centres in search of livelihood This became the reserve from which was drawn the class of wage labourers, the urban proletariat at a later period in India's economic history

Years later when the administration of the country was directly and fully taken over by the British crown a member of Parliament declared in the House of Commons in 1858 "I do most confidently maintain that no civilised government ever existed on the face of this earth which was more corrupt, more perfidious and more rapacious than the government of the East India Company from 1765 to 1784 It is not clear why this esteemed gentleman did not notice the very same features in the subsequent periods of British rule

The East India Company brought its own English staff for

trade and administration From the clerk to the governor general almost everyone indulged in corruption. They returned to England with their ill-gotten gains and were derisively called Nabobs' by their own compatriots

As their territories grew and the tasks of administration increased, they needed Indians not only to man their armed forces, which they were doing from the beginning, but also to create an army of clerks and subordinate officials **Marx** described this in the following terms

"From the Indian natives reluctantly and sparingly educated at Calcutta under English superintendence, a fresh class is springing up, endowed with requirements for government and imbued with European science"

V

The British plunder of India became one of the chief sources of original and primary accumulation of capital for the English bourgeoisie going over from the stage of mercantile capitalism to that of industrial capitalism The last quarter of the 18th century saw the rise of a new class of capitalists in England--the industrial capitalist This new class clashed with the old mercantile capitalist class, particularly in regard to the mode of plunder of India

The main demand of this new class was End the monopoly trade of the East India Company It wanted the Indian market for the goods manufactured in its factories at home run on the basis of modern machine In 1813 the British parliament ended the monopoly of trade enjoyed by the EIC

What was the result on India? While the East India Company was engaged in buying Indian textiles produced by our handloom weavers and taking them to the European markets, with the end of its monopoly of trade and with the coming in of the industrial manufacturers the role was reversed India became the dumping ground for British textiles and the new political power attained by the industrial capitalist class was

used to promote this

All this led to the further ruination of our handloom industry, the decay of important urban centres of this industry and the unemployment of millions of our weavers

Similarly, towns which were centres of manufacture of metalware and other kinds of goods were ruined because of their inability to compete with England's machine-made goods Millions of artisans were rendered unemployed in this process It led to intolerable pressure on agriculture, because agriculture itself was in a state of decay In this situation, further pressure on agriculture contributed to increased impoverishment of the peasantry and led to unprecedentedly devastating famines According to official estimates more than 2 crores of people died in the period 1825-1900 as a result of these man-made calamities Indian economic structure was decisively wrecked The traditional union of agriculture and industry in India was shattered imposing unspeakable misery on millions

Karl Marx writing in those very times described this exploitation and its consequences in a style full of poetic pathos

"All the civil wars, invasions, revolutions, conquests, famines, strangely complex, rapid and destructive as the successive action in Hindustan may appear, did not go deeper than its surface England has broken down the entire framework of Indian society, without any symptoms of reconstitution yet appearing This loss of his old world, with no gain of a new one, imparts a particular kind of melancholy to the present misery of the Hindu,* and separates Hindustan, ruled by Britain, from all its ancient traditions, and from the whole of its past history" (* Marx used the term Hindu' in the sense of an inhabitant of Hindustan)

VI

The last years of the 19th century and the first decades of the 20th century are marked by the transition of capitalism from its industrial stage to that of monopoly and the rule of finance capital--the imperialist stage of capitalism

The British colonialists while continuing the old forms of exploitation of India (trade, tribute, dumping of manufactured goods) now added new forms of exploitation corresponding to the imperialist stage The export of capital (the capital the English bourgeoisie had built on the basis of the plunder of India) to India and profits from its investments became one of the distinguishing features of this period This capital was invested in plantations, jute, railways, banking, insurance, etc

This export of capital went on increasing from year to year For instance while on the eve of the first world war (1914) it amounted to Rs 500 crore, it had doubled by 1933 By 1914 the interest and profits plus the direct tribute drained out from India was much more than the profits from trade, manufacture and shipping This showed that the exploitation of India by finance capital had become the dominant factor in the total system of exploitation of the country It has been estimated that in the period of the rule of the Company (1765-1858) the total tribute extracted from India was about 15 crore pounds But in the period of the finance capital, in two decades, the annual drain from India to England was also about the same, i e 15 crore pounds It shows the intensity of exploitation of our country under the rule of finance capital

The main features of the British-imposed colonial economy to further their exploitation were

(i) Imposition of the English type of feudal relations and perpetuation of feudal relations as a social base for its rule

(ii) Keeping the country divided by propping up hundreds of native rulers--from substantially big native states to petty chieftains, in an effort to keep these regions insulated from the general national movement against direct British rule and

(iii) Perpetuating the backwardness of the country by thwarting industrial growth, systematically hindering the development of national industry and depriving it of basic industries

Simultaneously, British colonial rule was marked by cul-

tural and political suppression of our people

The British left a legacy of appalling illiteracy, mouthing the humbug of their civilising mission' English was made the official language while regional languages were suppressed or discouraged Press laws, and other laws were promulgated to muzzle the voice of the people Democratic rights and civil liberties were severely suppressed. Political parties (especially the Communist Party), were not allowed to function legally *Leonine repression* was let loose against popular movements

Against all this our people repeatedly rose in revolt and finally brought the British colonial rule to an end

VII

The Indian people--various sections of them, carried onbitter struggles against the alien oppressors--struggles which began from the day the British launched their drive to subjugate the country These struggles went through various phases, employing various methods and means each a distinct stream which left its imprint and colour on the common flow

To begin with, it was mostly the princes and the feudal elements who resisted the British, as the latter went on encroaching on their territories and grossly interfering in their affairs, whether by force of arms or trickery The imperialists invented the notorious Doctrine of Lapse for depriving native princes of their domains and confiscating the same to themselves There was no meek submission to the perfidious actions of the British

Common people also took to arms inspired and led by leaders who raised religious slogans and carried on struggles under religious garb This was the natural ideological armament of those who took the path of struggle in the 18th century

We read about the **Sanyasi-Fakir rebellions** in the second half of the 18th century, which were led by such folk heroes as **Majnu Shah, Bhawani Pathak** and **Debi Choudhurani** (immortalised by **Bankim Chatterjee**) These rebellions covered

an area from the eastern part of Bihar to the whole of north Bengal These rebellions brought together both Hindus and Muslims The guerilla tactics adopted by Majnu Shah is testified to in the official report sent to the governor general-in-council in October 1784, thus

"Majnu has trained his followers in such a manner that as soon as they are pursued they disperse only to meet at a point where their presence is unthinkable"

The harassed officials admitted that, "Majnu has given strict instructions to his followers not to exploit or molest the people or accept anything but voluntary donation from them"

About those times in the northwest, the **Wahabis** under the leadership of **Syed Ahmed Barelvi** led a series of anti-British revolts The Wahabi movement was inspired by puritanic and fundamentalist socio-theological ideas But in Bengal, the Wahabi and later the **Farayzi** movement assumed a mass peasant character, though under a religious flag The movement in Bengal had both an anti-landlord and anti-British character, under the redoubtable leadership of **Titu Meer** and **Dudu Mian**

Down south we hear of the revolts led by **Rani Chinamma** of Kittur; of the fight put up by **VeerpandianKattaboman** the people's resistance organised by **Rayanna in Karnataka**, by **Vijaya RamRaja** of Vishakhapatnam, **Veer Raja** of Coorg, **Velu Thampi** of Travancore, **Narayan Reddy** of Kurnool and several others who are remembered and honoured as folk heroes

As we said before, many of the rebellions and armed resistance against the alien aggressor wore a religious garb In a backward country, with the dominance of a feudal system and with the sway of feudal ideology, it is often the case that the struggle against an oppressor (foreign or local, but more so the former), takes a religious form, particularly, in its initial stages This corresponds to the level of consciousness prevalent at the time, and also to the then social forces However, all these

movements played a role in rousing and keeping alive the patriotic and anti-British sentiment among the people Their significance lies not in the degree of success or failure that they achieved, for in point of fact they were all crushed with brute force but in the culture of resistance' that was built up among the people, which fuelled the more powerful actions in subsequent decades

The developing anti British feeling in the country found reflection also in the Indian Army History records a number of mutinies by soldiers under various pretexts such as the one at Patna in 1764 which Major Munro suppressed by blowing the ring-leaders from the mouths of cannons (a pleasant and refined pastime resorted to quite often by the British on later occasions such as the 1857 revolt) the mutiny at Vellore in 1807 the mutinies at Barrackpore Berhampore and Ambala'

They were to reach their climax in the 1857 revolt'

While the upper classes and the educated middle class leadership was for a long period forced into political submission by the ferocity of British repression against any armed uprising, the tribal people took to arms on several occasions against the alien aggression on their soil The most notable of these, was the **Santhal Rebellion** in 1853 led by the intrepid brothers **Kanhu and Siddhu Murmu** the Bhil uprising in Maharashtra and much later i e in the last few years of the 19th century, the tribal *ulgulan'* (armed resistance) in the Chhotanagpur region under the leadership of **Birsa Munda** Worthy of recall are also the peasant uprisings such as the **Indigo Revolt** the **Deccan Riots** and so on

The scattered and often sporadic actions of the early 19th century were like so many claps of thunder which heralded the mighty storm in 1857 The 1857 revolt which burst out simultaneously in several parts of the country has been justly termed as the **First War of Independence' by Karl Marx**

VIII

The accumulated anger of not only the various disinherited classes (viz some of the princes and the old feudals), but also the ruined peasants and the artisans, combined with the revolt of the sepoys--the peasants in uniform' against the humiliation suffered by them burst into a mighty storm, the like of which had not been witnessed before It was truly a national revolt As compared to all earlier actions, there was a greater degree of organisation purpose and cohesiveness behind it To downplay its significance British scribes and historians chose to call it a sepoy mutiny' And that is how it has continued to be described in English-inspired text-books on history But even public figures in England at that time were not taken in by such characterisation

Speaking in the British Parliament on July 27, 1857, no less a person than Benjamin Disraeli had observed "The Indian disturbance is not a military mutiny but a national revolt"

A few days after the revolt broke out, and the mail in England carried the report, Marx wrote on June 30 1857

" it is evident that the allegiance of the Indian people rests on the fidelity of the native army, in creating which the British rule simultaneously organised the first general centre of resistance which the Indian people was ever possessed of Before this there had been mutinies in the Indian army, but the present revolt is distinguished by characteristic and fatal features It is the first time that sepoy regiments have murdered their European officers, that Mussalmans and Hindus, renouncing their mutual antipathies, have combined against their common masters, that disturbances beginning with the Hindus, have actually ended in placing on the throne of Delhi a Mohamedan Emperor; that the Mutiny has not been confined to a few localities, and lastly that the revolt in the Anglo-Indian army has coincided with a general disaffection exhibited against English supremacy on the part of the great Asiatic nations, the revolt of

the Bengal army being beyond doubt intimately connected with the Persian and Chinese wars"

The great Indian revolutionary whose later life was a tragic denial of his earlier revolutionary promise **Vinayak Damodar Savarkar** also described the 1857 revolt as a War of Independence', something which the so-called liberal bourgeois leaders were not then willing to acknowledge

The 1857 Revolt was drowned in blood British officers and soldiers vied with each other in perpetrating the most atrocious acts of brutality, the like of which had rarely been witnessed before on such a scale

Mass massacres indiscriminate hangings, inhuman tortures burning and looting of villages and towns, collective fines imposed on villages and mohallas were among the common practice adopted by the British to crush this revolt' Blowing the ring-leaders from the mouth of the cannon, stringing up ordinary civilians on roadside trees, shooting people wholesale or putting them to the sword irrespective of sex or age and leaving the corpses to be picked by vultures and jackals bayoneting sepoys as if in field practice holding drumhead court martials to sentence them to death, these were among the common practices of British officers who had been detailed to quell the revolt It was a gruesome ordeal for the Indian people

Even the British governor general Lord Canning in a letter to Queen Victoria had to admit

"There is a rapid and indiscriminate vindictiveness abroad even among those who ought to set a better example which is impossible to contemplate without a feeling of shame for one's countrymen Not one man in ten seems to think that the hanging and shooting of 40,000 or 50 000 men (an obvious underestimation so as not to hurt the feelings of his sovereign queen), can be otherwise than practicable and right "

The names of **Mangal Pande** and his comrades-in-arms, of **Nanasaheb Peshwa** and **Tantya Tope**, of **Rani Laxmibai** of

Jhansi and of **Ajeemulla Khan**, and the rather tragic figure of **Bahadur Shah Zaffar** (the last scion of the Mughal dynasty) will for ever remain emblazoned in the hearts of Indians

IX

The feudal elements had made peace with the British overlords following the crushing of the Revolt and Victoria's proclamation which offered them an olive branch As for the educated middle class it sought for avenues within the Raj Giving up the idea of overthrowing the mighty British power in India for the time being intellectuals who were nevertheless fired by a sense of national pride and national identity and therefore wanted to rid society of its shame, devoted themselves to awakening the Indian masses from outmoded medieval practices rituals and thoughts Big social reform movements came up in almost all parts of the country They not only took up issues like prohibiting the practice of *sati* or legalising widow remarriage, but also took up the cause of education, including among women and the lower castes development of modern Indian languages and literature, etc They played a significant role in rousing national consciousness and awareness of people's rights And though these movements did not directly and specifically call for overthrowing the British power--rather seemed to live with it, one cannot imagine the further advance of the national liberation movement without their contribution in the popular awakening There are some even today who are unable to see the bond between the social reform movements of the later half of the 19th century and the freedom movement of the early 20th century The two together are inextricably bound in the movement for social and political emancipation, in the struggle for liberation from human bondage

The pioneering work of such reformers as **Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar, Vivekanand, Dayanand Saraswati, Mahatma Jotiba Fuley, Savitribai Fuley, Gozulu Lakshmanarasu Chetty, Sri Narayan Guru, Ramasway Pillai** and several others laid the foundation for our

national reawakening Later day reformers like E V **Ramaswamy Periyar', Dr B R Ambedkar,** built up on this solid edifice, and further developed mass awakening among the lowest strata of society

Creative writers and poets like **Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Bharatendu Harish Chandra, Munshi Premchand, Kazi Nazrul Islam, Subramanya Bharati, Gopabandhu, Vallathol** and many others in different languages made unforgettable and immortal contribution in developing national literature that is fired with the ideas of liberation culture and imbued with social justice

Actual resistance to British power however did not cease during this period A section of intrepid youth who could never reconcile themselves to living under the foreign heel kept up the fight **Vasudeo Balwant Phadke** (1848 83) can be acknowledged historically as the pioneer of this stream of national revolutionaries (miscalled terrorists' by the alien government) They carry a proud record of courage and supreme self-sacrifice which is second to none in our country No believer in planning individual assassination of British officials or their agents this remarkable man recruited sturdy young men of the ramoshi tribe and the bhils the kolis and the dhangars and even the redoubtable rohillas With their help he fought a tenacious guerilla battle against the imperialists till he was caught in 1879 and convicted to a life term in the first sedition case in India He was sent to Aden jail where he died on February 17 1883

Numerous secret societies with recruits from the educated middle class families sprang up during the last decade of the 19th century and the first three decades of the 20th To mention a few we had the **Anushilan and the Yugantar**, the *Hindustan Republican Association* (later renamed as the *Hindustan Socialist Republican Association* under the influence of the October Revolution), the **Naujawan Bharat Sabha** and so forth It is from this class of national revolutionaries that arose the immortal martyrs **Chaphekar** brothers, **Khudiram**

Bose, Ramprasad Bismil, Ashfaqullah, Bhagat Singh, Chandrashekhar Azad, Surya Sen and others whose names are for ever inscribed in the pantheon of national heroes

Among the muslims, the revolutionary teachings of **Maulanas like Obeidullah Sindhi** and **Mahmudul Hasan** resulted in young *Mujahids* (during the first world war) and *Mujahirin* youths (immediately after it), secretly leaving India for carrying on anti-British activities from Afghanistan and the tribal areas beyond the North West Frontier province Quite a few among them later on found their way to Soviet Union and became communists

As to the tribal people who lived as if in a world apart, they took up arms against the foreign aggressors and their local agents in several places Most noteworthy is the tribal revolt under the leadership of Birsa Munda in Chhotanagpur, mention of which has already been made Some time later there were similar resistance battles fought by tribals in the Srikakulam area under the leadership of **Alluri Sitaram Raju** One recalls with awe and admiration the resistance put up by these simple adivasi folk with nothing but bows and arrows against the fearsome and well-equipped British troops for prolonged periods

During this period, the role of Indian revolutionaries abroad too was very significant One has only to recall the activities of **Lala Hardayal** and **Sohan Singh Bhakna** of the Ghadar Party, and all others of the **Kama Gata Maru** fame Mention must also be made of Indian revolutionaries like **M N Roy, Abani Mukherjee, Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, Dr Bhupendranath Dutta** and those who turned communists in Moscow Some among them even took the first step to set up an Indian Communist Party abroad

All these events constitute the background to the birth of the Congress in 1885 and to the subsequent growth and development of our freedom struggle

X

To sum up With the development of imperialism, the stage of finance capital and its rule, and with the defeat of India's First War of Independence in 1857, the Company was finally abolished British capital started pouring into India, particularly in fields which opened up the Indian market to British penetration, and which did not come into competition with British manufacturing industries A network of railway lines and telegraphs was laid out Plantations and coalmines were developed, cotton textile and jute mills came to be set up

Alongside British investments, the cotton textile industry in particular, began to draw the new Indian bourgeoisie which was emerging out of the commercial usurious and mercantile community

New classes, new forces thus began to appear on the Indian scene With the British-owned industries and the rising Indian bourgeoisie, there also appeared the modern working class, the class of wage-labourers coming forth from the mass of pauperised peasantry and artisans

All these developments were leading to the emergence of a new type of national-liberation struggle By the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, objective conditions had been created for such a development These may be summarised as (a) The birth and rise of the Indian bourgeoisie and with it of course, the modern working class, (b) The growth of a new educated middle class from which arose the political representatives of the new bourgeois class, whose conflict with the British ruling class was inherent in the situation From this class also came, the national revolutionaries, who with growing experience and maturity and under the influence of national and international events leaned towards communism and other radical and left trends in Indian politics (c) The class of peasants who were groaning under the unbearable burdens imposed on them by the landlords and the foreign administration, also as the growing class of landless labourers, and

impoverished artisans

From now on we see these classes and social forces playing their role in the development of the freedom struggle

XI

For almost 20 years after its formation the Congress was dominated by the politics of petitions and resolutions The leadership was essentially moderate, but with a modern western outlook **Dadabhai Naoroji, Phirozshah Mehta, G K Gokhale, Badruddin Tyabji** were undoubtedly great men But they were not men of the masses Those leaders reflected the political aspirations of the rising Indian bourgeois class which was still weak Their petition and resolutions raised demands for a certain sharing of power in the sphere of politics and economy They had not yet acquired the confidence and the strength to fight for these demands But certain strata of our people were becoming increasingly conscious of the nature and significance of these demands and of the need for steps to get them realised The Congress had set in motion new political forces and when the time came these forces broke the bounds that had been set by the leadership

1905 marks a point of departure from the old forms and methods of struggle as well as from the old leadership of the national liberation movement From petitions and resolutions sections of the people came over to militant actions

The partition of Bengal in 1905 masterminded by that crafty British viceroy Lord Curzon, became the signal for the unleashing of a mass movement demanding annulment of the partition. A new kind of upsurge of nationalism radical in character swept the urban areas (mainly) and considerable sections of the petty bourgeoisie were drawn into it

This was the period when **Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Lala Lajpat Rai, Bipin Chandra Pal, Aurobindo Ghosh** became the spokesmen of this militant nationalism This period also witnessed an upsurge in what came to be known as the *terrorist*

movement Tilak and others of the new radicals in the leadership kept close contact with this movement of the national revolutionaries They acknowledged it as a part of the national liberation movement

A high-water mark of this period was the six-day strike by more than two lakhs of Bombay s textile workers against the arrest and conviction of Tilak in 1908 a day for each year of sentence It was an action which Lenin hailed from afar in the following words "The Indian proletariat has already sufficiently matured to wage a class-conscious political mass struggle

Perhaps this was an overdrawn conclusion, for the Indian working class still lacked its primary organisation, not to speak of any political organisation But there can be no doubt that this marked the emergence of the Indian working class on the political arena of the country

The period also saw a good deal of stirring among the Muslims particularly their intelligentsia. A number of patriotic and anti-British journals were launched by representatives of this intelligentsia. They played a very important role in raising anti-British sentiment among the urban Muslims

However this phase of the movement although radical and militant as compared to the earlier phase had some negative features also The urban petty bourgeoisie both Hindus and Muslims had religious sources of inspiration too in their fight against imperialism Organisations like the Muslim League and the Hindu Mahasabha also came to be formed in the period. Even though an overwhelming section of Hindus and a large section of Muslims fought shoulder to shoulder in the common freedom struggle and developed a secular outlook and tradition of this movement, the situation developed in such a way that in many cases there were *convergent actions* and not quite *joint actions* against the common enemy--viz. British imperialism Such for instance were the Non-cooperation Movement and the *Khilafat* agitation The consequences of this were seen in later days when large sections of Muslims drifted away from

the common movement and rallied behind the Muslim League

XII

The post-first world war is marked by an entirely new stage in the freedom struggle of our country With the advent of Gandhiji into the leadership of the Congress the movement began to acquire a mass character Gandhiji appealed directly to the masses His appeal was not confined to the urban petty bourgeoisie It drew the peasants in a big way into the struggle He put forward new forms of struggle, i e non-violent and peaceful satyagraha', and non-cooperation with the alien government These were forms which could draw in all sections into the struggle With the non-cooperation and the khilafat movements proceeding together, the period witnessed an unprecedented hindu-muslim unity

The period of 1919-22 was thus one of tremendous upheaval of the Indian people against British imperialism and for national liberation The postwar discontent against worsening conditions and the push given by the October Revolution of 1917 to the world revolutionary movement brought a surge of strength to the national liberation struggle as also to the newly growing labour movement The hartal and general strike against the Rowlatt Act and the wave of indignation that swept the country after the Jallianwalabagh massacre not only mobilised the general mass of people, but also the working class into action with its specific forms of organisation and struggle

The 1919-22 movement stirred the whole country from one end to the other. But once the mass initiative was unleashed, it could not be contained within the limits set by the bourgeois leadership This has been observed again and again in the course of our national-liberation struggle and it was so in this movement also

The peasantry which had been aroused did not see the freedom struggle as an abstract question. It saw in this movement a way out of their age-long feudal oppression and the police repression which was always unleashed to support the feudal landlords against the peasants There were peasant upheavals

n Malabar (Moplah revolt), in Andhra, UP and other places Thus the concrete class question also came up on the agenda along with the question of freedom from alien British rule

The Chauri Chaura incident (in Gorakhpur district of Uttar Pradesh) during which some policemen were killed, was a symptom of such peasant upsurge in the course of the Non-co-operation movement This was used as an argument by the Congress leadership to withdraw the movement

The withdrawal of the movement naturally led to terrible demoralisation among the masses and among the active freedom fighters There was widespread disillusionment with the Gandhian way of conducting the struggle especially among the youth They sought a different way and a revolutionary ideology for carrying forward the struggle Some were drawn to the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, drawing inspiration from the Russian Revolution which had come out forcefully in support of the national liberation movement in the colonies of imperialism Some others were drawn to a broad left ideology

It is at this stage that the Communist Party of India came to be formed From the moment of its conception and birth, communists and the Communist Party of India began to exert and play an important role in the freedom struggle of the country

The genesis of the Communist Party is the revolutionary anti-imperialist liberation movement of the country And from its birth, it is this role that it fulfilled in the twenties thirties and the forties

Near about that period another force had also germinated This is what has come to be known as the Rashtriya Swayam Sevak Sangh (the RSS) the progenitor of the Bharatiya Janata Party and the entire Sangh Parivar The genesis of the RSS BJP is the Hindu fundamentalist-communal breakaway from the mainstream of the national liberation movement distancing itself from that movement It is this role which it played althrough Its attempt now to claim any part of the freedom legacy is patently false and unjustified

XIII

The rise of the Communist Party in the twenties marked an important milestone in the development of the national liberation movement Its birth was the result of tremendous historical developments at home and abroad Communists did not appear on the scene all on a sudden They were not born out of nothing coming out suddenly as it were, from Bramha's head Nor can one speak of the role played by the communists in the freedom struggle without putting on record the historical setting of the freedom struggle from its very inception. That is why we have recounted a brief overview of our struggle till date

We speak of the role of communists as such in the national liberation struggle for the reason that till freedom and for a decade and a half thereafter there was only one Communist Party--the CPI Only later the party got divided Therefore the contribution of the communists in the freedom movement, the glory and the achievements flowing from it are a common heritage while the mistakes and shortcomings are also shared

The CPI was born in the period when the anti-imperialist struggle in India had acquired new mass militant dimensions taking the shape of the historic Non-cooperation Movement in 1919-22 led by the Congress and headed by Gandhiji The workers, peasants middle classes and youth had been roused to new levels of consciousness and action Thousands of militant patriotic cadres had been thrown up by the national upheaval But the disappointment and disenchantment caused by the sudden withdrawal of the non-cooperation movement impelled them to search for new more revolutionary and consistent platform and forms of anti-imperialist struggle They turned towards the path blazed by the Russian Revolution which had a special message for the toilers and the peoples of the East, of the colonial countries

The victory of the Russian working class peasants and other toilers led by the Bolsheviks attracted the militant youth

of India as of all lands It inspired them to study, accept and apply the science of Marxism so that they could lead their people forward along the road of revolutionary struggle for national and social emancipation

The CPI was born and grew out of the disillusionment of the national-revolutionaries with the methods they had employed hitherto, which despite all their unparalleled heroism and sacrifices had failed to rouse the masses into action against British rule In prison camps and in places of exile abroad, they began to search for more effective forms of mass militant struggle against the hated foreign oppressor They were inevitably attracted towards the scientific revolutionary ideology of Marxism

The Communist Party was born in the fire of the class upsurge of the workers and of the peasants and students manifested in a wave of strike struggles anti-landlord actions anti-imperialist boycotts and hartals This had already led to the foundation of the **All India Trade Union Congress** in 1920--the first central organisation of workers at the national level Conscious of the historic role of the workers and peasants in the development of the freedom struggle, groups of communists went to work among them to organise them to build the trade union and later the kisan movement on the foundation of class struggle to bring them forward to the arena of the broad freedom struggle and to imbue them with ideas of socialism

The CPI was born out of the fusion of the struggle for national liberation and the class struggle for socialism of anti-imperialist patriotism and internationalism Its genesis thus has to be traced to the struggle for national liberation and social emancipation It is the natural inheritor and continuer of the revolutionary legacy in our centuries'-old freedom struggle--a legacy which it carried forward involving the broad toiling masses in the struggle and voicing their aspirations

Most of the streams of activists from the various revolu-

tionary movements eventually flowed into the Communist Party and joined the ranks of communists Thus

The heroes of the Ghadar Movement like **Baba Sohan Singh Bhakna, Santokh Singh, Kartat Singh Sarabha and Gurmukh Singh,** brave colleagues of the immortal martyrs **Bhagat Singh and Chandrashekhar Azad like Ajoy Ghosh, Sohan Singh Josh, Shiv Verma,** intrepid fighters and disciples of **Surya Sen** of Chittagong Armoury Raid fame like **Ganesh Ghosh** and **Kalpana Dutt,** and hundreds of others convicted in numerous conspiracy cases' found their way into the Communist Party

Chandra Singh Garhwali, the courageous sergeant of the Garhwal Regiment who refused to obey the order to fire on peaceful satyagrahis in Peshawar during the Civil Disobedience Movement in 1930 and ordered his unit to ground arms, also found his way into the Communist Party along with colleagues after coming out of prison

The legendary hero of Manipur, **Irabot Sing** who led the Praja Mandal, the Quit India movement the various armed anti-feudal upheavals in that state and suffered imprisonment and banishment for many years, also joined the Party after coming in contact with Marxism during his jail life The number of such never to be forgotten heroes, whether in the thirties or early forties are legion. They cannot all be named here

The Andamans, Deoli, Buxar, Hijli and other prison camps became universities of revolution' where these long-term prisoners after deep study and reflection, turned from revolutionary terrorism to Marxism, and joined the Communist Party after their release

These are pages of history which cannot be torn out of any objective text-book on our freedom struggle

We must pause here for a moment and pay our respectful homage to all those who paid with their lives or spent a lifetime in prison to realise their dream of Freedom They knew that

great dreams are only made reality through immense sacrifices though they may not live to see the dawn of Freedom and social emancipation.

XIV

Even before the Party was founded, communist pioneers in our country as individuals and as groups, had raised the demand for overthrow of British imperialist rule and for India's complete independence As early as 1921 at the Ahmedabad Session of the Indian National Congress, **Hasrat Mohani** (who was later the chairman of the reception committee at the foundation conference of the CPI) had put forward the demand for complete independence, which Gandhiji had then turned down as irresponsible and impractical This was 8 years before the Congress finally came round to raising the demand for complete independence At the Gaya Session of the Congress in 1922, **Singaravelu Chettiar** (who later presided over the Kanpur foundation conference of the CPI) repeated this demand and won greater support

As stated before inspired by the October Socialist Revolution, Indian nationalists and revolutionaries both in India and abroad, had started gravitating towards the communist movement As many as four Peshawar Conspiracy Cases' were launched against those (mostly muslim revolutionaries, known as mohajirs') who were trying to return to India through the North-West Frontier between the years 1922-24 Imperialism had hoped to nip in the bud the infant communist movement in India by handing out savage sentences against them and by slandering them as Moscow agents' But that was not to be Communism had found a fertile soil in India We must recall that similar savage sentences were meted out to the Ghadar heroes, most of whom were either sent to the gallows or to life imprisonment in the kalapani' at Andaman Islands

Once again in 1924 imperialists struck and launched the Kanpur Conspiracy Case' against M N Roy (absconding) S A. **Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta, Shaukat Usmani,**

Singaravelu Chettiar, Gulam Hussain and others In the chargesheet served on March 17, 1924 it was stated that the main aim of the accused--all communists was "to deprive the king emperor of his sovereignty of British India by complete separation of India from imperialistic Britain by a violent revolution " In May 1924 four of them, **Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Nalini Gupta** and **Usmani** were sentenced to four years' imprisonment

After this the British rulers triumphantly declared that "Kanpur has finished off the communists"--a declaration in regard to communists, that has been oft repeated till today by imperialists and their Indian pupils These gentlemen have never learnt the lesson that no force on earth can stop an Idea whose time has come In fact a year after the Kanpur case the CPI was formally founded at Kanpur itself

Functioning semi-legally, the CPI set up an open forum known as the All India Workers' and Peasants' Party As a party dedicated to complete national and social liberation of our people the CPI came forward with a programme of the anti-imperialist and democratic revolution These were formulated and adopted at the first national conference of the Workers' and Peasants' Party in 1928

Land to the tiller! Nationalisation of foreign imperialist capital! Adult suffrage! The nation's wealth in the nation's hands! Eight hour working day! Democratic rights of organisation meeting demonstration and strike! Social equality for women! Social justice for the untouchables!—these and other demands which were destined to become the entire nation's demands, were first voiced from the platforms of the communists and the AITUC

The 50 000-strong demonstration at the time of the 1928 Calcutta Session of the Congress first brought these demands to the attention of the leaders, activists and supporters of the Congress Important elements of this programme were taken up by the Congress only at its Karachi Session in 1931 It was at

the Calcutta Session in 1928, that the demonstrators perhaps first raised the slogan. **Inquilab Zindabad'**—a slogan that became the rallying call of resurgent India. Once again the Congress was urged to adopt complete independence as its goal This resolution was adopted after a year at the Lahore Session of the Congress

This militant revolutionary spirit inspired and guided the unforgettable national protest against the Simon Commission, the all-British body that came to India in 1928 to find out what further dose of reforms', if any should be doled out.

Earlier at the instance of communists who had become a force within the AITUC, a hotly debated resolution on boycotting the Simon Commission had been adopted. When the Simon Commission landed in Bombay on February 3, 1928 30 000 workers marched to the Gateway of India shouting **"Simon Commission, Go Back"! "We Want, Complete Independence"! "We Want 8-Hour Day"!** etc. Similar demonstrations broke out all over the country—in Madras, Calcutta, Lahore—where **Lala Lajpat Rai** had to bear lathis rained on his head.

Communists had launched vigorous activity both in the national liberation and working class movements Their activities in the political field marked them out as a revolutionary left-wing of the freedom movement Therefore, the imperialists again singled them out and struck at them, by arresting 31 leading communists and trade unionists in March 1929 This has gone down in history as the Meerut Conspiracy Case Among the arrested were **S A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed, Gangadhar Adhikari, P C Joshi, S S Mirajkar, Sohan Singh Josh** and others This time too the chargesheet stated that the accused "have conspired with each other persons, known or unknown, in British India, to deprive the king emperor of the sovereignty of British India"

Communists had by then acquired a position in the political life of the country Much against the calculation of the imperialist rulers, that they would succeed in isolating the communists and beheading them, the entire national movement

rallied in solidarity with the accused Jawaharlal Nehru himself headed the Defence Committee, and as president of the AITUC called upon the British Trade Union Congress to organise movement in support of the Meerut accused In a rare gesture Gandhiji visited them in jail and had a long and friendly discussion with them The Meerut court forum was skilfully used by all the accused to put across the communists' views about the cause of national liberation and socialism before the Indian people

Near about this period, a new kind of revolutionary' movement different from the one that was there in the first decade of this century had also come up particularly in Bengal Punjab UP and some other places This movement had definite left leanings and did not act under religious slogans It was influenced by the Russian Revolution, but had not yet accepted the Marxist ideology Such were the Naujawan Bharat Sabha and the Hindustan Socialist Republican Army led by **Bhagat Singh, Chandrasekhar Azad** and his comrades the band of youth led by **Masterda' (Surya Sen)** who raided the Chittagong Armoury, the *Jugantar* and *Anushilan* groups in Bengal Many of them climbed the gallows or were shot But it is significant that most of the survivors after coming out of long incarceration joined the Communist Party Till the very last moment, with Death staring him in the face, **Bhagat Singh** continued to read the writings of Lenin Could there be a more speaking message as to his political inclination?

XV

In the early years of the freedom movement most of the educated leaders who usually came from the upper castes generally kept themselves aloof from issues of social reform Apart from those who were steeped in orthodoxy many of these leaders maintained that freedom from foreign rule has to come first the rest would follow thereafter Some went to the length of saying that those who emphasised the urgency and priority of social reforms were not interested in the forward march of the

freedom struggle This approach was not acceptable to the advocates and fighters for social reform However it would be the greatest travesty of truth to question the ardent patriotism of men like Fuley and Ambedkar and their commitment to India's freedom But there are some small men with narrow outlook who dare to do so even today

It is to the credit of Gandhiji that unlike other leaders, all through the movement he crusaded against untouchability, though he continued to support the *varnashram*, holding that, "The four varnas are fundamental, natural, essential while the innumerable castes are excrescences "

It was left to Dr Ambedkar to directly rally the dalits, to urge them to stand up organise and fight for their rights, for self-respect for social equality though he did not always link this fight with the united anti-imperialist struggle and the struggle for agrarian revolution

There is an accusation that the communists ignored the issue of caste while preoccupying themselves only with class The fact is that the communists not only recognised the reality of castes but actually linked it with the question of the anti-imperialist struggle and the agrarian revolution Here is what they said in the very first Platform of the Party in 1930

"As a result of the rule of British imperialism in India, there are still in existence millions of slaves and tens of millions of socially outcast working pariahs who are deprived of all rights British rule, the system of landlordism the reactionary caste system religious deception and all the slave and serf traditions of the past throttle the Indian people and stand in the way of emancipation only the agrarian revolution and violent overthrow of British rule will lead to the social, economic, cultural and legal emancipation of the working pariahs and slaves "

This was a radically different understanding of the problem than that of the other bourgeois and petty bourgeois leaders of the national movement, though it too underestimated the need for a social and ideological struggle against the caste sys-

tem, caste inequality and atrocities perpetrated in the name of caste, and the practical steps that are needed if the evil caste system was to be eliminated altogether

XVI

By 1930, the situation had again built up for a new wave of struggle The Lahore Congress in 1929 had authorised Gandhiji to launch and lead the struggle A Civil Disobedience Movement was announced by him Between 1930 and 1934 (with a short break in 1931 after the Gandhi-Irwin pact when Gandhiji was persuaded to visit London, where his effort to get something through the Round Table Conference, proved abortive), the Congress launched the second big round of mass movement, starting with Gandhiji's Dandi march or salt satyagraha in Gujarat But once again, whatever the limits set by Gandhiji, this period witnessed several revolutionary movements whose significance cannot be overemphasised

In Sholapur, following the arrest of Gandhiji, there was a huge upheaval For the first time, the working class in alliance with other anti-imperialist forces of the city overthrew the coercive British apparatus and established a kind of people's power Martial Law was imposed and the British could restore power only after a few days Four leaders, including the secretary of the Workers' Union were hanged

In Peshawar, as mentioned before, the Garhwal Regiment refused to fire on the peaceful Khudai-Khidmatgar demonstrators The soliders were Hindus, while the demonstrators were Muslims This was an example of Hindu-Muslim unity in the course of revolutionary struggle Because the army had joined hands with the anti-imperialist fighters, Peshawar remained in the hands of the people for 10 days It had to be recaptured by the British forces

The Chittagong Armoury Raid took place about this time and Bhagat Singh and his comrades were hanged about that very time, almost on the eve of the Karachi Congress Session A wave of indignation swept the country In this background,

the Karachi Congress adopted a resolution on basic rights

The C D movement was also withdrawn, and the Round Table Conference again ended up without any agreement This was a movement on a much larger scale then the 1920-22 Non-cooperation movement This time too the Congress leadership tried to keep the movement in leash But the mass consciousness and the popular movement had grown considerably

A negative development which had serious consequences was that while the general masses were rallying increasingly towards mass action, and behind the Congress as a united platform of the national liberation movement the Muslim masses were more and more drifting away towards the Muslim League The fear of Hindu domination in a Free India was being drilled into their heads From this arose the demand for breaking away the Muslim majority provinces and forming them into a separate state of Pakistan. The pernicious *two-nation theory'* which based nationhood on religion, was put forward. This theory was voiced by V D Savarkar the president of the Hindu Mahasabha at its Ahmedabad Session and vociferously by the Muslim League at its Lahore Session The ground was prepared for the partition of the country, along with Freedom

XVII

Radical trends among the masses had developed Within the Congress itself, the Congress Socialist Party came to be formed under the leadership of Jay Prakash Narayan

Communists also joined the Congress in large numbers and were elected to the AICC, and various provincial and district congress committees

The biggest development, however, was the building of mass organisations of different sections of the people in which communists, socialists, and other radical elements also participated

The AITUC had already come into existence as far back as 1920 It registered tremendous growth, overcoming splits and

also stimulating the growth of other industrial unions

In 1936 along with such revolutionary-democratic personalities like **Swami Sahajanand Saraswati** and **Indulal Yagnik** the **All India Kisan Sabha** was set up under whose banner in the following years, mighty anti-feudal peasant actions demanding an end to the zamindari system, for security of tenancy rights and for land to those who till it were fought The great writer and thinker **Rahul Sankrityayan** personally led a number of kisan struggles from the AIKS platform and faced imprisonment **A K Gopalan, Jeevanandam, Karyanand Sharma, Moni Singh** and hundreds of others became household names in the course of kisan struggles The names of the **Kayyur** martyrs (in Kerala), the heroes of the **Tebhaga, Telengana, Pepsu** and **Bakasht** struggles are never to be forgotten

The same year, i e 1936, the **All India Students' Federation** was founded, which emerged as the foremost champion and leader of the student movement throughout the country The AISF played an important role in rallying the student community to the freedom struggle, particularly during the post-war upsurge

These independent mass organisations built and developed by the communists and other left and radical elements helped conduct independent mass struggles, which added greatly to the popular mobilisation in the freedom struggle

An important step was taken in the cultural field, by organising the **Progressive Writers' Association** in 1936, and the **Indian Peoples' Theatre Association** in 1943 Personalities from the literary and arts field lent their support and participated actively in their work These organisations helped in rousing the consciousness of the people by becoming the harbinger of a new popular, progressive anti-imperialist and anti-fascist democratic culture Communists and other progressive writers and artists played a pioneering and organising role in these organisations

XVIII

Though the Civil Disobedience Movement had been withdrawn by the Congress leadership, the activities of all the mass organisations kept the anti-imperialist fervour alive The contribution of these mass organisations built up by the left wing within the national movement was understood by Jawaharlal Nehru who as president of the Congress both at Lucknow in April 1936 and later at Faizpur in December 1936 had proposed collective affiliation of the mass organisations of workers and peasants to the Indian National Congress The proposals were dropped because of right wing opposition to the idea

Meanwhile, elections were announced to the provincial assemblies under the Government of India Act, 1935 After considerable debate the Congress decided to contest the elections It won majorities in 9 provinces where it formed ministries However, except in NWFP the Congress failed to win in Muslim-majority provinces, viz Punjab, Bengal and Sind It showed up the Congress failure to draw the majority of the Muslim masses, though elsewhere it swept the polls despite limited franchise

The 1937 elections electrified the political atmosphere in the country, accelerated the process of radicalisation of the masses and further raised their anti-imperialist consciousness Though the ministries had limited power and they could not do much for the people yet they added to the prestige of the Congress and helped expand its base

The left wing within the Congress which included communists socialists and others was also emerging as a strong force It took up the challenge of the right wing in the Congress presidential election before the Tripuri Session in 1939 With the support of the left wing, **Subhas Bose** won the election But as the left was not united and therefore was not a decisive force, the right wing backed by Gandhiji, whose influence was decisive could mount a counter-offensive Bose resigned and the right wing regained the leadership of the Congress

XIX

World War II broke out in September 1939 The imperialist rulers of our country first struck at the most militant section of the national liberation movement, in order to weaken the struggle against the imperialist war. Thousands of leftists (communists constituting the largest group among them) were arrested and detained without trial The comparative legality which the communists had managed to secure after the formation of the Congress ministries in 1937 (the CPI was still under a ban), vanished They were the main targets of repression

Meanwhile, the Congress ministries resigned The Congress working committee in its resolution correctly observed that, " the Committee cannot associate themselves or offer any cooperation in a war, which is conducted on imperialist lines and which is meant to consolidate imperialism in India and elsewhere " The communists by themselves were not strong enough to initiate a mass movement against the war, or to influence the Congress in that direction They launched a few strike actions and a number of demonstrations

Gandhiji launched what came to be called, **Individual Satyagraha'** by selected satyagrahis for asserting the right to speak against the war The masses who were rallied powerfully behind the Congress, were held in leash

In June 1941, with Hitler's attack on the Soviet Union, the international situation underwent a profound change The issue now was to ensure the defeat of the fascists An anti-fascist coalition which included the Soviet Union, Britain and America came into being The question of defence of socialism of gaining independence of colonies, of safeguarding democracy, became a life and death issue The communists declared that the struggle for our independence is linked with the victory of the anti-fascist coalition in the war There was never any question of supporting the British or suggesting that the nature of British imperialism had changed

The communists were not alone in recognising the change in the international situation and the character of the war This is what Jawaharlal said in December 1941 'The progressive forces of the world are now aligned with the group represented by Russia Britain America and China "

The Congress Working Committee in its resolution adopted in December 1941 stated, " While there has been no change in British policy towards India the Committee must nevertheless take into consideration the new world situation which has arisen by the development of war and its approach to India The sympathies of the Congress must inevitably lie with the people who are subject to aggression and are fighting for their freedom but only a free and independent India can be in a position to undertake the defence of the country on a national basis "

The Congress asked for a national government to mobilise the Indian masses and prosecute the war effectively The CPI was also for a national government to the same end

The British refused to accept this demand Meeting on August 9 1942 in Bombay the Congress gave a call for struggle and Gandhiji gave his famous call for Do or Die', telling the British to Quit India' Gandhiji and the Congress leaders were promptly arrested the very next day The CPI condemned this as a provocation and continuously demanded their release and the formation of a national government of national unity for national defence"

Popular indignation burst out throughout the country In the course of the *leonine repression* resorted to by the British, tens of thousands were arrested, and that number included thousands of communists It is a slander to say that communists supported the British in 1942 It is true there were certain differences in the approach of the communists and certain sections of the Congress leadership But it is not uncommon to have differences on occasions The Party committed a tactical mistake

in 1942 in failing to combine the anti-fascist struggle with the national liberation struggle at a crucial period Which party can dare say it has committed no mistake ever? Only a revolutionary party has the courage to frankly own up its mistakes and make amends

Because of the party's loyalty to the people its active participation in their struggle and abiding faith in its ideology the Party could overcome the mistakes and the harm caused by them One can only laugh derisively when one hears the BJP/ RSS leaders who kept miles away from the freedom struggle and the 1942 movement attack communists for their failures!

It is no accident that heroes of that struggle like **Nana Patil** of Satara fame and his comrades-in-arms **Aruna Asaf Ali** and her left socialist group **Sarjoo Pandey** of Ballia and Ghazipur fame and thousands more 1942 activists from all parts of the country soon afterwards joined the Communist Party Is that not a befitting and thundering answer to all the slanders?

In the very first general election that took place after Freedom in 1952 the communists emerged as the second party in Parliament Is that not a tribute to their painstaking and patriotic work among the people? The post war upsurge saw the communists as active participants and in the forefront of the struggles that broke out in the country

XX

Following the defeat of the bid for world domination by the fascist powers a gigantic post-war revolutionary upsurge swept across the globe Our country and our people also moved forward to the final and decisive confrontation with British imperialism the ground for which had been prepared by the several-decades' old national struggle

Unprecedented mass demonstrations shook the country taking the form of solidarity actions with the soldiers and officers of the **Azad Hind Fauz (INA)** founded and led by **Netaji**

Subhas Bose Workers students youth all patriots and democrats moved massively in Calcutta Bombay Madras Delhi, Karachi in fact in every nook and corner of the country The CPI cadres threw themselves into this tremendous anti-imperialist upsurge **Captain Laxmi** of the Rani Jhansi Regiment later joined the Communist movement and is now in the CPI(M)

This tidal wave had its impact on the armed forces resulting in the strike of men of the **Royal Indian Air Force** and in the historic uprising of the men and Indian officers of the **Royal Indian Navy** in 1946 The armed forces of the British government began to turn against the oppressors of our people in a manner unparalleled since the great Revolt in 1857

It was a significant gesture when the naval ratings of the RIN pulled down the Union Jack on their ships and hauled up the flags of the Congress the Muslim League and the CPI' When the British vice admiral arrogantly threatened to sink the ships they appealed to their compatriots for support and approached the leaders of these parties While the Congress and Muslim League leaders refused to respond, it was the CPI which boldly swung into action and called for solidarity strikes demonstrations and other forms of militant actions More than 2 lakh workers in Bombay were on strike and demonstrated powerfully in support of their sailor-brothers In the battle that raged on the streets of Bombay between the white soliders (the British could no longer rely upon the Indian troops and police), and the demonstrators more than 200 were killed

The British government realised that they could no longer continue to hold India in bondage and continue to rule in the old way They started negotiations with the Congress and Muslim League leaders which finally led to Freedom but mixed with the tragedy of Partition

XXI

It is necessary to describe the role of the Communists in the struggle of the people from the native states which was an

area neglected by the Congress till the very last From the outset the CPI targeted the native rulers and the feudal lords who were the support base of the British imperialists in India Along with other anti-feudal and democratic sections (mostly oriented towards the Congress) communists launched and built the Praja-Mandal and states' peoples' movement in a number of native states In 1853 Marx had branded the princely states "the stronghold of the present abominable English system and the greatest obstacle to Indian progress"

The intensity of the movement in British India naturally influenced the movement in the native states Communists were in the forefront of the struggles in the erstwhile states of Hyderabad, Travancore, Cochin Patiala (Pepsu), Bhopal Manipur, Dhenkanal-Talcher Nilgiri and so forth Thousands of them sacrificed their lives, faced inhuman tortures and suffered in these struggles And if later the native states were finally and irrevocably integrated into Free India the credit was in no small measure due to their heroic fight The struggle for their full integration had in some cases to be carried on even after August 15 1947

One recalls with pride today the saga of these struggles, especially when the scions of some of these princely families are playing an increasing role in the bourgeois ruling parties and holding forth as great patriots and nationalists

Telengana symbolises one of the most heroic of such struggles led by the CPI It was first and foremost a struggle to throw off the Nizam's yoke to integrate the Hyderabad state in India and to bring to an end the autocratic repression of the people It was truly a liberation struggle--against imperialism which was the main prop behind the Nizam and against feudalism represented by jagirdars and deshmukhs, as also a struggle for national integration and for the distribution of land Four thousand people lost their lives in this struggle

A similar death-defying battle was fought in October 1946,

by people in Allepey (Travancore state), on the site of two villages **Punnappra-Vayalar,** against the rule of the Maharaja and his autocratic Diwan It was a struggle for putting an end to the conspiracy of imposing a so-called American model' in Travancore for introduction of adult franchise for establishing a democratic government and merging the state in India In this battle nearly 500 were shot down, several hundreds maimed, and thousands thrown into prison where they suffered inhuman torture While the communists led this struggle the State Congress was collaborating and compromising with the Diwan

XXII

Such has been the glorious role played by communists in the freedom struggle--a role which was not always free from errors and tactical blunders but one which was imbued with the spirit of patriotism and selfless service to the toiling people a role that was full of sacrifices and sufferings

The Party and the mass organisations, the social and cultural organisations that it had helped to build, had limited influence among our multi-crore people It could not therefore decisively influence the turn of events at all stages of the national movement which continued to be led by the Congress with Gandhiji at the head But at all times, the Party continued to fight against the feudal-reactionary forces against the dual imperialist and bourgeois exploitation, for the fundamental and democratic rights of the people against repression and for civil liberties against the divisive forces and for Hindu-Muslim unity against social oppression and for social justice, against orthodoxy and obscurantism and for social reforms

The Party popularised the ideas of socialism among the masses which gave a perspective of planned development and social progress for the country

It is outside the scope of this booklet to analyse India's achievements and failures in the course of the five decades after Freedom or the Party's successes and failures in this period We can only look around and define our tasks of the present

so as to ultimately achieve the goal of Socialism which is our objective

We need not go into the progress or the lack of progress in several spheres during these five decades That would be another story Suffice it to say that before the British were compelled to quit India and to transfer power, a Tory Prime Minister had superciliously remarked that the Indians would be incapable of running the country that chaos and anarchy will follow their departure from India's shores 'After me the deluge', so they though As we look down the fifty years long road travelled by us we can say with pride that democracy has survived and flourished in India even though it has its limitations because of the bourgeois system within which it operates We not only had a number of elections to parliament and state assemblies We have also carried it to the grass-root level —to the level of village panchayats and zilla parishads Our people have shown that they have the maturity and the understanding to remove governments that have pursued anti-people policies, and to substitute them by other governments They have proved their capacity to end the monopoly of one-party rule, when it proved incapable of solving the problems of the people And all this has happened, despite the play of negative factors like communalism casteism and other divisive forces Democracy secular unity have developed strong roots in these fifty years This is no mean achievement It is the basis of future advance

Today recalling the sufferings and sacrifices of our freedom struggle, reminding ourselves of the noble ideals for which the people fought for freedom and recapturing the spirit of that struggle inspired by the ultimate goal of socialism of ending exploitation and social oppression we have to move forward to defend our independence and sovereignty from the pressures and dictates of imperialist agencies and to fight for radical social transformations

We have to defend our national unity and integrity and the democratic-federal character of our polity We have to combat

and hold at bay the communal reactionary forces

India is a mul i-lingual multi-religious multi-cultural countrv Yet throu_h all this pluralism and diversity there has been down the ages an underlving sense of unity and togetherness' The common national liberation struggle had further fostered a tradition of secularism These are strong barriers to the growth of communal forces provided the left and secular-democratic forces stand on guard

We have to deepen the meaning of our democracv by ensuring social justice by empowering women dalits and backward sections of society who have been victims of inequalitv deprivation and oppression over the ages We have to protect the minorities and provide facilities for their development along with the rest of our people

We have to undertake measures for overcoming the problems of poverty unemployment illiteracy and disease The role of the state in these spheres cannot be whittled down

We have to press ahead with land reforms and distribution of land to landless, and eradicate illiteracy as the two preconditions for any real advance

We have to defend our public sector as well as our indigenous cottage small-scale and even big industries while inviting foreign capital in spheres where we need their technologv and resources We have to combat the policy of *neo liberalism'* expressed in the form of liberalisation privatisation and globalisation as advocated by the IMF World Bank, the MNCs, and by the group of d_veloped states within the WTO

We certainly wish to interact with the global economv to play our role in world trade and so forth but not to subordinate ourselves to the interests of the developed world which looks at every issue from its narrow angle

We have to defend our culture from the cultural imperial-

ism' that wants an open field and open skies for its domination

All this and more, calls for further strengthening of the Communist Party the Left, and consolidation of Left unity so as to develop its clout in national politics It calls for building Left and Democratic Unity so as to move towards a Left and Democratic Government in our country The celebration of the Golden Jubilee should lead to a leap forward in the patriotic and democratic consciousness of our people

It should alert the CPI, the CPI(M) and other constituents of the Left as well as the secular-democratic parties for undertaking the above tasks

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